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IDOLATRY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

C ONTEMPORARY ART has long claimed the privilege—indeed, the duty—of criticizing the images produced by the mass-culture industry.¹ Now, however, both media images and works of art are increasingly coming under attack for religious reasons. It often seems as if Islamist fundamentalism has effectively conspired with the Western media and their Enlightenment rhetoric to create a culture war that perpetuates itself from one event to the next. These events (and pseudo-events) range from the dramatic murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh to the Danish cartoon riots, Jack Straw's remarks on veils and the decision of the Deutsche Oper in Berlin to cancel a planned staging of Mozart's *Idomeneo*—in which the severed heads of Jesus, Mohammed and Buddha were to be shown alongside that of Poseidon. Sometimes there need be no event at all: media reports that some British banks no longer hand out piggy banks to children, so as not to offend Muslim customers, turned out to be just as unfounded as the end-of-year hysteria over the alleged banning of Christmas by overzealous, politically correct bureaucrats and managers.

So far, the art world has shown little inclination—at least on the institutional level—to respond to such real or perceived challenges to the spectacular regime of visibility that it is itself so keen on exposing. Nonetheless, individual artistic practices offer compelling reflections on the renewed vigour of monotheistic attacks on images and on the visual regime of the capitalist West as such; I focus here on Dutch examples, but within the broader context of the global religious contestation of the spectacle.

Many of the most prominent incidents in the current image wars involve the veiling or unveiling of the female body. In 2003, an Amsterdam tenement was decorated with a monumental mural of a nude woman, inspired by a poem by Jacob van Lennep, *Ode aan een roosje* ('Ode to a Rose'), which was splashed across the façade and the body of the woman; a clothed man, presumably the author, floated over the text and the woman's legs. Although the inhabitants of the neighbouring buildings, many of them Muslims, were polled prior to the work's execution (apparently with largely positive results), once completed the mural was attacked both verbally and physically, with black paint. In the end, a compromise was reached: the woman's pubic area was pixellated, turning it into an abstract grid. The ideological opposite of such revealing public art can be found in the town of Susa, Iran, in the form of a mural showing the upper part of a woman in Islamic dress, her face visible but her body concealed, her eyes demurely averted. An accompanying text proclaims: 'A woman modestly dressed is as a pearl in it's shell' [sic].²

Over the past few years, the appearance of women who adhere to a strict definition of *hijab* dress in European cities has provoked increasing controversy. This focuses above all on the veiling of the face, with only a slit left for the eyes—or even less, as in the Afghan *burqa*, which covers the eyes with an embroidered grille. After a group of Muslims who allegedly plotted to kidnap and kill a British Muslim soldier on leave from Iraq were arrested in early 2007, British newspapers showed a photo of three veiled women in Birmingham, one of them making a V-sign. Although this is an extreme case, images of veiled women have become a minor genre in European newspapers—one indication that the veil has come to function as a screen on which cultural anxieties and desires are projected, and not just from one side. This is not the place to explore the cultural history of the veil, which reaches back before the beginnings of Islam or Christianity, and often has social rather than religious connotations; nor to engage in the debate over whether the veil is actually prescribed by Islam, or is just a cultural habit; whether it is a means of oppression, or a choice made by strong and emancipated women. The fact is that the polysemic veil has become a logotype of the dangerous Muslim other;

¹ A revised version of this essay will appear in the forthcoming *Citizens and Subjects: The Netherlands, for example*, edited by Maria Hlavajova, Rosi Braidotti and Charles Esche, as part of the Dutch contribution to the 2007 Venice Biennale.

² I know the Susa mural through a photo taken by Frank Denys.

it has become a prop in today's image wars. Islamists use it as a highly visible statement of their ability to protect Muslim values in the face of an antagonistic Western culture, while Western liberals perceive it as an attack on such a culture, often focusing on the question of women's rights. In this respect they follow in the footsteps of the far-from-liberal Lord Cromer, British consul-general in Egypt in the late nineteenth century, who already ideologized the veil as a sign of the oppression of women. This reading at least has the virtue of being open to appropriation by Muslim women: a Dutch news photograph taken in late 2006 shows the full-body veil being used by Muslim women in a protest against their deportation to Afghanistan, where they would be forced to wear such *burqas*—they have wrapped themselves not only in *burqas*, but in pictures of the then Immigration Minister Rita Verdonk, or 'Iron Rita'.

The status of the veil as a media myth that would have delighted Roland Barthes—the veil as sign for Oriental mystery and danger, hiding an inaccessible, exotic feminine body—has been countered by (mainly female) artists including Shirin Neshat and Zineb Sedira.³ The Dutch artist Fransje Killaars, who in the early 1990s switched from painting to making installations with textiles, has recently taken to draping some of her bedspreads, with their brightly coloured grids, on tailor's dummies. These abstract and impractical full-body veils draw attention to their materiality and sensuality—to their own surface and texture rather than their status as obstructions of the gaze, as a hindrance to seeing what lies beneath. Titled *Figures* and posed in groups, they form a constellation that invites comparison and contrast. Killaars also shows one or two dummies that are not covered in the manner of a *burqa*, but around which a bedspread is draped from the neck down in the manner of a cape. In contrast to the *burqa* forms, the 'cape' *Figures* use dummies whose heads have been removed; the cape is crowned by nothing. By 'exposing' the veiled face as a void, these *acéphales* join the other works in privileging the cover over the covered, the veil over the veiled. If the media represent the veil as a blot that obscures the essence, the woman beneath—a woman supposedly in need of unveiling to make her free—Killaars's *Figures* make the veil visible as something integral rather than exterior to the figure.

³ See various contributions in the exhibition catalogue *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*, London and Cambridge, MA 2003. The concept of the exhibition was Zineb Sedira's.

Important as work such as Killaars's is, there is no denying that it remains marginal in a culture in which the veil has been hijacked by right-wing mouthpieces who routinely invoke the Enlightenment in a way that reduces critique to neatly packaged dogma for the age of the soundbite. One such Enlightenment fundamentalist is Somali-born Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who during her years in Holland—she has since moved on to the US, to work at the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute—wrote the script for a short film on the role of women in Islam. Programmatically titled *Submission (part 1)*, the 2004 film was directed by Theo van Gogh, who famously described Muslims as backward 'goat-fuckers'; he paid with his life for *Submission* when he was stabbed to death on an Amsterdam street in broad daylight by a young fundamentalist now famous as Mohammed B. *Submission* shows a woman wearing a dark but transparent veil that reveals parts of her body, upon which Koranic verses on woman's submissive role have been written in ornate calligraphy. The film's voice-over monologue contains harrowing stories of various forms of abuse, and depicts the veil as a prison, the innermost circle of an extremely restricted world. The element of truth in this is compromised by the reduction of the veil, of its ambiguity and contradictions, to a cartoon image. Turning women wearing veils into the faceless face of otherness allows Hirsi Ali and her allies to ignore the questions raised by the rise of the veil in Europe—questions that can be uncomfortable for the heroic defenders of western liberal values.

Mid-twentieth-century pioneers of radical Islamism such as Sayyid Qutb of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood saw capitalist culture as the return of *jahiliyya*, the paganism of pre-Islamic Arabia. This pagan state was characterized by *shirk*, the associating of other gods or beings with Allah; *shirk* functions as an equivalent of Judaic or Christian conceptions of idolatry. Like idolatrous Rome for the Christians, the *jahiliyya* was also associated with uncontrolled and promiscuous sexuality; indeed, the early Jewish conception of idolatry frequently compared it to adultery. Ever since Sayyid Qutb, the comparative sexual freedom and sexualization of the public sphere have been regarded as crucial symptoms of the new Western idolatry. Not only is thought itself turned into an idol by Western rationalists, as Qutb stated with horror; sinking even lower, the Westerners also idolize the body. But then, perhaps this is just a front for the true idolatry: as the Iranian thinker Ali Shariati stated, in an idiom that may seem oddly familiar, sexual freedom is 'part of a new exploitation, a type of limitless deception, which the impure system of

Western capitalism produces'. Behind the seductive appearance of commodified sexuality lie 'great idols and the three faces of the contemporary religious trinity: exploitation, colonialism and despotism'.⁴

By blending Islamic phraseology with that of Marxist political theory, of which he is critical even while using it against capitalism, Shariati reappropriated and resacralized a discourse that itself appropriated and transformed Jewish and Christian elements. Today's European and American Enlightenment fundamentalists, who specialize in using a critique of Islam and of Muslim societies to deflect attention from the West's destructive political, military and economic operations, attempt to disavow any link between religion and the 'Western values' they claim to represent. However, the Enlightenment is scarcely thinkable without the monotheistic critique of idolatry; nor, for that matter, are modern critical theory or artistic practice. The symbolic gesture of 'unveiling the truth', which has been so popular since the Enlightenment, is indebted to this heritage—and the use of the veil in contemporary Islamism, paradoxical as it may seem, can itself be seen as following rather than breaking the logic of unveiling.⁵ Is the veil not effectively being used to unmask and lay bare the limits of Western liberalism—to reveal it as a sham, an ideology in the service of capitalist powers?

As theorists and historians of iconoclasm gleefully point out, iconoclasts also create new images; contemporary practitioners like the Taliban are media-savvy enough to be fully aware of this dialectic, and to exploit it.⁶ As used by Islamists, the veil is iconoclastic, an attack on the idolatrous adoration of the human body in the West. When artist Lidwien Van de Ven engaged with the ubiquitous iconography of the veil in her work, two forms of iconoclasm were deployed. In an exhibition in Paris in 2006, Van de Ven showed a photo she had taken outside the French embassy in London, showing veiled women protesting against the anti-veil ruling for French schools. This and other images were pasted directly onto the

⁴ Ali Shariati, *Fatima is Fatima*, Tehran 1981, ch. 5.

⁵ On the Enlightenment iconography of unveiling Isis (mysterious nature), see Jan Assmann, *Moses der Ägypter. Entzifferung einer Gedächtnisspur*, Frankfurt 2000, pp. 188–96.

⁶ For a routinely and somewhat tiresomely provocative take on Islamist terrorists as iconophiles who reinforce rather than attack the belief in images, see Boris Groys, 'The Fate of Art in the Age of Terror', in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds, *Making Things Public*, Karlsruhe 2005, pp. 970–5.

wall; in the second stage of the exhibition, they were washed over with a thin coat of white paint that allowed the images to shine through. Both obscuring the photographed veils and giving them a new visibility, Van de Ven endowed the media myth with an ambiguously physical, and at the same time unreal and ethereal, status. Van de Ven's gentle artistic iconoclasm makes the underlying image visible again—visible as representing not stubborn or stupid backwardness, but an iconoclastic act in its own right; an act whose religious as well as political nature needs to be addressed, rather than sociologized or pathologized.

From one spectacle to another

The protests occasioned by the Danish cartoons of the prophet Mohammed reflected anger (however manipulated) not only at the fact that Mohammed was caricatured, but at the fact that he was depicted at all. After all, this is a breach of the ban on depicting the prophet which is derived from a certain interpretation of the Mosaic ban on idolatry. The current image wars represent a new wave of the monotheistic idolatry critique enshrined in the Second Commandment in Exodus 20:4, forbidding graven images 'or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth'. This is elaborated upon in Deuteronomy 4:15–19, where the Israelites are reminded that they 'saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire', and that representations of people and animals should be avoided because they might lead to 'corruption', to worshipping of these images (a similar danger existing in the case of the sun, moon and stars).⁷ There are, in effect, two prohibitions: God must not be represented; nor must living creatures, planets or anything else that might be worshipped, so as to avoid idolatry. But the first error, or sin, is idolatry as well. Idolatry is not only the worship of false gods but also the worship of Jehovah in an image; the image itself becomes a false god.⁸ At first, worshipping other gods was a real temptation; later, when this was no longer a danger, idolatrous tendencies within Jewish monotheism were seen as a risk.

⁷ Different religions count the Commandments in differing ways. In Judaism and most Protestant churches, the ban on idolatry is part of the Second Commandment; in Catholicism, it is subsumed under the First.

⁸ Edwyn Bevan, *Holy Images: An Inquiry into Idolatry and Image-Worship in Ancient Paganism and in Christianity*, London 1940, p. 39.

In practice, the degree to which images were made and the way in which they were used over the centuries varied widely in the Jewish religion, as well as in Christianity and in Islam. The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation mitigated the ban on the depiction of God and his creation; God had become man, the word had become flesh, and therefore open to depiction. Of course, Byzantine iconoclasts and Protestants argued that such images could still be put to idolatrous use, sometimes adding that images of Christ could only represent one of his two natures—the physical one, not his divinity. The Muslim fear of a relapse into *shirk*, the ‘associating’ of other deities or powers with God, manifests itself in a rather extreme ban on *tasweer*, images that might stimulate such idolatry. However, although contemporary Western as well as Islamist ideologues are intent on making Islam appear monolithic, the ban on depicting Mohammed was also subject to successive waves of radicalization and relaxation; it is not as absolute as some contemporary ideologists suggest, as quite a number of old miniatures show.⁹ The repression of such unwelcome historical complexities allows fundamentalists to create a Manichean dichotomy between Islam and the idolatrous West—the new *jahiliyya*. This discourse can be seen as a more radical form of the Christian critique of Western culture.

For Christians, the Roman empire remained the paradigm of an idolatrous society. Roman games in particular had been attacked by Tertullian in his *De Spectaculis* as prime examples of *eidolatreia*, and the fascination with Roman spectacle and decadence in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century culture, from the paintings of Gérôme and Alma-Tadema to later film productions, suggested that modern society might be a Rome returned—the triumph of idolatry disguised by Christian rhetoric. However, the Christian criticism of capitalist modernity was increasingly supplanted by a secularized discourse hailing from the Enlightenment and shaped by, yet also transforming and transcending, its monotheistic roots. In *Du Culte des dieux fétiches* (1760), a text that encapsulates the Enlightenment’s transformation of monotheistic *topoi* into instruments of secular critique, Charles de Brosses claimed to unveil the most primitive form of religion, the embryonic first stirrings of idolatry: fetishism, or the worship of random objects rather than statues or other man-made images. Although the Enlightenment subjected

⁹ See the ‘Mohammed Image archive’, at www.zombietime.com.

religious dogma to an open-ended critique, this opposition of dogma and critique should not obscure the fact that the gestures of ‘revealing’ gods to be idols and long-held truths to be superstitions are fundamentally the same, and that monotheistic discourse on pagan religion constituted a nascent form of critique—an idolatry critique transformed by the modern critique of religions and society. Religious dogmatism already contained the seeds of critique, just as critique may still be crucially dependent on dogma.

In a letter written shortly after Theodor Adorno’s death, in which he attempted to explain why his friend had not been buried according to Jewish rites, Max Horkheimer claimed that critical theory was based on the Second Commandment—the ban on representations of God, or, in more fundamentalist interpretations, on representation of all living beings.¹⁰ Modern critical theory, in other words, analysed and opposed fascism and the culture industry as latter-day idolatry. Although Horkheimer’s remark was obviously made during highly emotional circumstances, it is true that the modern critique of representation is in many ways a transformation of the monotheistic discourse on idolatry: the divine Commandment fostered a suspicious and critical mentality that was finally turned against dogma itself. From De Brosses to Marx and beyond, the concept of the fetish as a primitive precursor of the idol still derives from monotheistic idolatry critique; Marx, of course, turned De Brosses’s African proto-idol into a capitalist commodity fetish, just as irrational and mystifying. However, in contrast to ‘idols’ according to monotheism, such fetishes are seen as a betrayal of what true humanity might be, rather than as transgressions of divine law. The difference between an early Christian diatribe such as Tertullian’s *De Spectaculis* and Debord’s Marxian treatise on *The Society of the Spectacle* is immense, even if the latter is indebted—however indirectly—to the former.

Jeroen De Rijke and Willem De Rooij’s film *Of Three Men* (1998) constitutes a montage—a possible dialogue—between the two forms of idolatry critique, religious and secular. The film shows the interior of an Amsterdam mosque that was formerly a Catholic church, built in the 1920s in a rather bulky and sober modernist-historicist style. The

¹⁰ Max Horkheimer, letter to Otto Herz, September 1, 1969, in Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 18: *Briefwechsel 1949–1973*, Frankfurt 1996, p. 743.

interior has been stripped of its Catholic paraphernalia; chandeliers and a bare floor complete the visual transformation. The film mostly focuses on the changing effects of the light coming through the windows; this light is largely artificial, and changes quickly. There is an obvious connection with seventeenth-century paintings, by Saenredam and others, depicting the whitewashed interiors of Protestant churches that were once Catholic, and highly painted. Whereas representations of such purified spaces are effortlessly contemplated for their aesthetic qualities, the image of a mosque sabotages such contemplation. In today's Europe, after all, mosques are often regarded with a wary eye. By treating the space in a formal way, as a receptacle for a light show, De Rijke and De Rooij suggest that a mosque too is a potential place of enlightenment—or Enlightenment—and reflection, just like those former Dutch churches that now function as cultural centres or spaces of debate.

In addition to overlaying a church and a mosque with their diverging connotations, *Of Three Men* also juxtaposes seventeenth-century pictorial representations of spaces created by iconoclastic fury with the black screen's re-enactment of modern artistic iconoclasm. Before the mosque is shown, at the beginning of the film, the image is black; then it appears that the camera's view has been blocked by some men in dark cloaks. While this recalls the occasional Hollywood practice of disguising cuts by having black clothing or some dark object momentarily block the view, its length and position at the beginning of the film also recall modern artistic iconoclasm—for example Debord's first film, *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* (1952), which contains long stretches of complete blackness. One need not accept Clement Greenberg's story of the Kantian origins and smooth progression of modernism to acknowledge modern art's self-critical bent—which also enables it to reflect on its own iconoclastic elements, and iconoclasm in general.¹¹ A 2006 installation by Krijn de Koning and Gert Jan Kocken combined three of Kocken's photographs of traces of iconoclastic rage in Dutch churches, showing mutilated stone reliefs, with a De Koning mural surrounding those pictures. Consisting of an irregular, meandering blue-and-white geometric pattern, the mural spreads out over the walls and ceiling like a bulky modernist ornament. Once more a montage of iconoclasm and

¹¹ Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting' [1960], in Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism 4: Modernism with a Vengeance*, London and Chicago 1993, pp. 85–93.

critiques is effected, setting the stage for a possible debate that would confound 'war on terror' verities.

Against visibility

If the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation legitimized the creation of a rich visual culture, the growing autonomy of this culture from religion and its integration into the emerging capitalist culture industry of the nineteenth century fuelled fears of a relapse into idolatry. Lew Wallace, author of *Ben-Hur*, the story of a Jewish prince whose life intersects at various points with that of Jesus, decided against the direct portrayal of Jesus in dramatic versions of his novel. Thus in the 1925 film adaptation, we see a Last Supper scene directly inspired by Renaissance paintings, Leonardo's *Last Supper* mural in particular, except for the fact that the sight of the centrally seated Christ is blocked by a lone Apostle sitting in front of him. All the viewer sees of Jesus is a halo and some hands. Possibly the figure in the foreground is Judas, who was often set apart from the others in Medieval and Renaissance paintings—but who was not, of course, placed in front of Christ. What made representations of Christ particularly sensitive in the context of *Ben-Hur* screenings was their character as commercial—even if devout—spectacles, complete with chariot races. It is no surprise that Muslim film directors took an even more radical stance on the issue of depicting Mohammed: in a 1976 film version of the life of Mohammed and the rise of Islam, *The Message*, director Moustapha Akkad scrupulously adhered to the ban on representing the prophet, instead choosing a rather risqué method of integrating Mohammed into the narrative—at certain moments, the use of subjective camera-angles makes the viewer see things *through Mohammed's eyes*.

Not only Muslims, but strict Protestants too have long struggled with the rise of modern image reproduction; the 'dictatorship of visibility' in today's media-saturated society multiplies the risk of idolatry. The radical Calvinist opposition to this dictatorship is commemorated in a 2003 video by Arnoud Holleman, which shows girls in the Dutch Calvinist enclave of Staphorst ducking away and hiding their faces when they realize they are being filmed. In this appropriation and editing of 1950s film footage, Holleman elegantly recalls that a radical rejection of being portrayed, of being subjected to the dictatorship of visibility, is not some strange and exotic recent import from the east. And of course mainstream Muslim

scholars' judgements, or *fatwas*, have long opposed the fundamentalist rejection of photography, film and video on theological grounds:

Photography as a medium of communication or for the simple, innocent retention of memories without the taint of reverence/*shirk* does not fall under the category of forbidden *Tasweer*. One finds a number of traditions from the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, condemning people who make *Tasweer*, which denotes painting or carving images or statues. It was closely associated with paganism or *shirk* . . . In other words, *Tasweer* was forbidden precisely for the reason that it was a means leading to *shirk*. The function of photography today does not fall under the above category. Even some of the scholars who had been once vehemently opposed to photography under the pretext that it was a form of forbidden *Tasweer* have later changed their position on it—as they allow even for their own pictures to be taken and published in newspapers, for videotaping lectures and for presentations; whereas in the past, they would only allow it in exceptional cases such as passports, drivers' licenses, etc. The change in their view of photography is based on their assessment of the role of photography.¹²

However, photography can certainly be abused: 'To take pictures of leaders and heroes and hang them on the walls may not belong to the same category of permission. This may give rise to a feeling of reverence and hero worship, which was precisely the main thrust of the prohibition of *Tasweer*.' In fact, the cult of 'martyrs' (suicide bombers) whose images are widely disseminated as models indicates that contemporary Islamist terrorists fully participate in the spectacle, eagerly producing images of destruction and embracing the dialectic of iconoclasm, in which destruction begets new—but unsettling—images. The media- and iconophobic Taliban took care to document the destruction of the giant Bamiyan Buddha sculptures. However, artist Sean Snyder has made the intriguing suggestion that image production by radical Islamists may still be deliberately iconoclastic; the bad technical quality of videos produced by Al-Qaeda may be intentional; far from primitive, these videos would be actively primitivist, opposing 'poor' images to the glitzy Western spectacle.¹³

¹² *Fatwa* by Sheikh Ahmad Kutty of the Islamic Institute of Toronto, available at www.islamonline.net.

¹³ Sean Snyder, 'Some Byproducts: Thoughts on the Visual Rhetoric of PSYOP', Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder, eds, *Concerning War: A Critical Reader*, Utrecht and Frankfurt 2006, p. 185.

In 2002, Arnoud Holleman was one of the editors of an issue of *Re-Magazine* that masqueraded as the Spring 2007 issue. In a series of entries dating from the distant past through the 1980s and 1990s to the future (from a 2002 perspective), a nameless 'we' reflected on various public and private events, culminating in a decision to eschew images; a decision dated, tellingly, to the year 2001, the year of 9/11 and the beginning of the end of the iconophobic Taliban regime. 'We couldn't cope with the absence of pictures. It created irrational fears. We couldn't see what was happening in Afghanistan. We *needed* images.' While this still reflects the general Western attitude, the 'we' soon make an iconoclastic turn of their own: 'Everything was image and nobody asked himself or herself why the ban was being violated. As an experiment, we covered or removed all images from our home. It cleared our heads. We asked friends to do the same.' In the end, this apparent iconophobia may be at the service of an intensified perception of images: 'We need the absence of images to appreciate the quality of an image when we see one.'¹⁴ This iconoclasm, an 'internalized form of the Second Commandment' that is not explicitly religious, searches for 'an alternative to the maelstrom of visual culture'.¹⁵

According to the Marxian analysis of Debord, the spectacle is not a matter of images or of media technology per se, but of the capitalist mode of production leading to the fetishistic projection of social life onto commodities, lived reality becoming a reified representation. As if to prove that he was no iconophobe, Debord turned the second volume of his autobiographical book *Panegyric* into a collection of pictures, noting that he appreciated images which have not been 'artificially separated from their meaning'. Although his stated intention of using pictures as 'iconographic proof' to illustrate a 'true discourse' betrays a secularized Christian desire to prevent images becoming too independent from the word, the pictures in *Panegyric*, all relating to Debord's life and work, nonetheless develop a pull of their own.¹⁶ Minimizing the number of images in the '2007' issue of *Re-Magazine*, which only contains a few photo sequences interspersed among the pages of text, Holleman and his

¹⁴ Preceding quotations in this paragraph all from *Re-Magazine* #23, Spring 2007 (2002), unpaginated.

¹⁵ Arnoud Holleman, 'The Second Commandment', text distributed at the Stedelijk Museum as part of Holleman's contribution to the group show *Just in Time*, 2006.

¹⁶ Guy Debord, *Panegyric*, London 2004.

collaborators question precisely the production of images separated from their meaning—images that veil rather than reveal, or veil by revealing.

Recently, Bruno Latour and others have zoomed in on the relationship between monotheistic idolatry critique and modern secular critique in order to discredit both: if, on the one hand, the monotheistic critique leads to iconoclastic violence while, on the other hand, secular critique has undergone inflation and degenerated into a habit, should not critique as such be treated with suspicion? Is not the whole rhetoric of unveiling the truth and destroying idols, fetishes and myths dubious and dangerous?¹⁷ While it is undeniable that ‘criticality’ is prone to becoming its own simulation, it would be the height of bad timing to abandon critique at a moment when both religious fundamentalists and the self-proclaimed defenders of the Enlightenment use their respective versions of idolatry critique to deflect attention from their inability to solve today’s pressing social, economic and ecological problems. Works like De Rijke and De Rooij’s *Of Three Men*, Killaars’s *Figures*, Van de Ven’s overpainted photos and Holleman’s magazine strongly suggest the need to effect a montage of various forms of critique—religious and secular as well as ‘Western’ and ‘Muslim’—in order to prevent them from becoming slogans in the culture wars staged by both religious and secular reactionaries.

¹⁷ Bruno Latour, ‘Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern’, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2003–04. See also Bruno Latour, ‘What is Iconoclasm? Or Is There a World Beyond the Image Wars?’, in Latour and Peter Weibel, eds, *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, Karlsruhe 2002, pp. 14–37.